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Twenty-Six Judges Evaluated on Courtroom Performance

Chief Justice Ronald Moon released the ninth Judicial Performance Program report that provides the results of performance evaluations of 26 judges.

Eight Circuit Court judges were evaluated between July 31, 2003, and August 26, 2003. In Family Court, eight judges were evaluated from May 1, 2003, to June 2, 2003. Ten District Court judges were evaluated from February 25, 2003, to April 1, 2003.

The Circuit Court judges had mean scores of 4.1 in the Legal Ability section, 4.2 for Judicial Management Skills, 4.2 for Comportment, and 4.1 in the Settlement and/or Plea Agreement Ability section. Scores were based on a scale of possible responses ranging from one, for Poor, to five, for Excellent.

The average score for the Family Court judges in the Legal Ability section was 4.2. The Family Court mean score in the Judicial Management Skills section was 4.2, the mean score for Comportment was also 4.2, and the mean for Settlement and/or Plea Agreement Ability was 4.1. As in Circuit Court, these scores were based on a one to five scale.

For District Court judges, the average score for the Legal Ability section was 4.2, the average score for the Settlement and/or Plea Agreement Ability section was 4.1, and the Judicial Management Skills section averaged 4.2. In these three sections, District Court judges could receive scores ranging from one to five, just as Circuit Court and Family Court judges could. The Legal Ability and Judicial Management Skills sections, however, do not have as many questions as those sections have for the Circuit Court and Family Court judges.

The Judge's Characteristics section in the District Court questionnaire had an average score of 3.3. The maximum score for this section was four, whereas the maximum score for the other sections was five. Possible responses for Judge's Characteristics ranged from Strongly Disagree, which received a score of one, to Strongly Agree, which received a score of four.

As in the past, the judges evaluated in this report were interviewed by members of the Judicial Evaluation Review Panel. The nine members of the Review Panel are Robert Alm, Momi Cazimero, Lawrence Foster, Lynne Kaneshiro, Douglas McNish, Willson Moore Jr., Herbert Shimabukuro, Betty Vitousek, and Eric Yamamoto. They are organized into groups of three to counsel judges from the Circuit Court, Family Court, and District Court groups. Each panel consists of one former judge, one non-practicing attorney, and one member of the public knowledgeable in the law.

All scores and attorney comments received for individual judges are made available to the Judicial Selection Commission upon request.

All currently eligible justices and full-time judges have been evaluated at least once. Most judges have received two or more evaluations since the program began.

Chief Justice Moon established Hawai'i's Judicial Performance Program as a permanent program in September 1993. The program's main goals are to: improve individual judges' performances; increase the efficiency of judicial management within the Judiciary; and provide the Judicial Selection Commission with a potential source of information for retention and promotion decisions.

The ninth report on the Judicial Performance Program may be viewed on the Judiciary's website at www.courts.state.hi.us. The report may also be viewed at the Supreme Court Law Library on O'ahu and at the Circuit Court law libraries on the islands of Hawai'i, Maui, and Kaua'i.

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